



Conservation Easements to Protect Wellheads for Rock County Rural Water System

Featured Project

The Rock County Rural Water System is located in the southwest corner of the state, near Luverne. The system provides drinking water to more than 700 rural farm residences and four small communities. The system relies on a shallow groundwater aquifer and 11 wells located along the Rock River. The Wellhead Protection (WHP) area is 4,470 acres in size, due to the geology and direct influence of surface water recharge to the aquifer and wells. Row crop agriculture production is the primary land use found in the WHP area.

Based on the critical importance of protecting this vulnerable aquifer today and for future generations, the Rock County Land Management Office has worked with landowners and farmers over the years to enroll 240 acres of Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Reserve conservation easements within the WHP area. RIM Reserve easements take the land out of production and restore the land to a natural state.

The Rock County Land Management Office continues efforts working with rural water system staff, farmers and other local partners to promote RIM Reserve and other conservation practices to protect the aquifer and wellhead protection area.



Water tower for Rock County Rural Water adjacent to a corn field.



Location: The Rock County Rural Water System's Wellhead Protection Area includes all or parts of 10 Sections located in Clinton and Kanaranzi Townships, Rock County, Minnesota.

Partners: Rock SWCD, Rock Rural Water, MN Rural Water Assn, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA), MN Department of Health.

Project Timeline: Wellhead protection conservation efforts and promotion of conservation easements to the public are on-going.

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Keys to Success: An ongoing working relationship and understanding exists between the public water supplier, SWCD and landowners about the importance of protecting limited groundwater supplies in Rock County. Persistent efforts of the County Land Management Office (SWCD), Rural Water System Manager and resource partners contributed to the successful RIM Reserve enrollments in the wellhead protection area. The Rock County Land Management Office does an outstanding job integrating conservation programs such as RIM Reserve into ongoing wellhead protection efforts in their county. Through local conservation successes they have helped a public water system avoid the need to consider expensive nitrate treatment and operation costs, which can run into the millions of dollars

BWSR roles: BWSR staff provides the necessary administrative, legal and engineering duties to be able to secure the conservation easements with landowners through the local soil and water conservation district (SWCD). BWSR duties include:

- verifying land ownership,
- preparing a legal description and map of the easement area,
- preparing a conservation plan,
- completing the agreement signed by the landowners and the state,
- encumbering conservation practice funds, and
- engineering design for restoration projects.

Easements are inspected annually by SWCD staff for the first five years, then every third year thereafter.

Measurable Outcomes: Through conservation programs such as RIM Reserve and other best management practices adopted by landowners and producers in the Rock County Rural Water Wellhead Protection Area, there have been reductions in nitrate levels found in several of the public water supply wells.

For more information: More information about the Rock County Wellhead Protection RIM enrollments contact: Justin Decker, Rock County Land Management Office at (507) 283-8862 or Dan Cook, Rock County Rural Water at (507) 283-8886.

